

Rialto Theater Restoration Project

Governors Award 2009

The recipient of this year's Governor's Award in Historic Preservation goes to the Rialto Theater Restoration Project in Deer Lodge for its outstanding work in local preservation. Would Steve Owens and Gayle Mizner of Deer Lodge please come forward to receive this award, please?

Since 1995, the Rialto Community Theater organization of Deer Lodge has worked hard and long to preserve the 1921 Rialto Theater. The theater, if you haven't seen it, is a remarkable example of "Beaux-Arts" style architecture in Montana. This classic American "movie palace" truly helps to define Main Street in Deer Lodge. In its 80-plus years of service the theater has been the focal point of entertainment within the Deer Lodge community.

Sadly, just when most of the preservation work was almost complete, a fire swept through and gutted the historic Rialto Theatre in November 2006. It seemed at first that all the years of fund-raising and hard work would be lost. But the silver lining to the tragedy was that the building's remarkable terra cotta outside façade remained intact. Recognizing that much of the building still remained, the good people of Deer Lodge wasted no time in starting to rebuild this cultural asset again.

The Rialto Community Theater, Inc. is made up of Steve Owens, Lee Jewell, Susie Blair, Ron Mjelde, Teresa Pierson, Kerry Bruner, Ted Johnson, Phil Maxwell, Mike Johns, Ron Scharf, and Gayle Mizner. Over the last two years this organization has raised \$1.9 million towards reconstruction of the Rialto Theater with a total fund raising goal of \$3.5 million in sight. If all goes as planned, they hope to be re-open for business as early as this summer!

Tonight we celebrate the Rialto Theater Restoration Project with the 2009 Governor's Award in Historic Preservation. By this we honor the remarkable dedication of the Rialto Community Theater group and also the many citizen volunteers, craftsmen, engineers and architects who have worked hard to save the Rialto Theater – not just once, but twice - so that it may continue to contribute to the culture and community of Deer Lodge.